Coliseum owner, seeking demolition, still after tenant

By HORTENSE LEON

Harold Vineberg, part-owner of the landmark Coliseum at 1500 Douglas Rd. — tenantless nearly five years — said that he would still like to see someone use his building, even though he has also petitioned the City of Coral Gables Historic Preservation Committee for permission to tear the 50,000-square-foot structure down.

Early last week, Mr. Vineberg told Miami Today he was suing a would-be tenant who signed a lease last year for $10 a square foot but who could not come up with the $2 million needed to renovate the 65-year-old building.

A rumor that an Ohio-based health club was Mr. Vineberg's unnamed tenant could not be confirmed. Last June, Miami Today reported the new tenant was to occupy the building by the end of 1991.

At the same time that he's still looking for a new tenant, Mr. Vineberg, a local investor with diverse interests, said his petition to the City of Coral Gables to demolish the structure was made public last Thursday (3/19). His case is to be heard at a hearing today (3/26).

Discussing the financial problems of his would-be tenant, Mr. Vineberg said "the problem was that the banking situation in the last six months has been very difficult." Although he understands his tenant's predicament, Mr. Vineberg said, "I have no choice but to sue to recover the expenses of leasing the building, although we will probably settle for a lesser amount out of court.

Coliseum has been opera house, skating rink, bowling alley and health club.

"Meanwhile," he said, "we are in a holding pattern, although lots of people are interested in the building."

Mr. Vineberg said he might expect to make $6.5 million if he sells the building and land, which occupy 3.25 acres.

A rough estimate of the cost of tearing down the building was $50,000-$75,000, according to Boris Kozolchyk, executive vice president of Summa Properties, which has offices in the Dadeland area.

Mr. Kozolchyk said Mr. Vineberg's price seems too high.

"I'd say it was worth $4 million to $4.5 million," he said.

The real estate executive said a mixed-use project with residential and retail components might be the highest and best use for the property.

"The zoning in that area allows for high density, which could mean apartments or condominiums. Retailing alone couldn't justify the price of the land, since it would require one or two stories for parking. Without the Coliseum, the property has about 145,000 square feet."

Speculating on a possible scenario, Mr. Kozolchyk said: "If a buyer paid $5 million for the property and built only 50,000 square feet of retailing, leaving room for parking, each square foot of land would cost him $100. Add to that $40-$50 a square foot to build a new building. His costs would be $150 a square foot. When you consider the vacancy factor, you would have to rent the place for $20 a square foot to recoup your costs and make a profit, which would be hard.

"The $10-a-square-foot arrangement which Mr. Vineberg had with earlier tenants was a good deal for him. If the building were torn down, the owner would be losing value. But the problem is that it is a single-use oriented building. A single user would have to spend a lot of money to remodel it, which may not be worth it."

Mr. Vineberg bought an interest in the Coliseum in 1957 from Holiday on Ice along with Stanley Peal, another local investor with diverse interests.

Built in 1927, the Coliseum has been an opera house, ice-skating rink, bowling alley and health club. It has been vacant since 1987, when the last tenant, Sportrooms, went bankrupt.

Mr. Vineberg's first look at the building was memorable — Norwegian three-time Olympic figure skating gold medalist Sonja Henie was rehearsing for a Holiday on Ice show.

After Holiday on Ice, the building housed Coliseum Lanes, one of several Dade County bowling alleys Mr. Vineberg operated. Sportrooms followed Coliseum Lanes in 1979 but shut down in 1987.